

The University of Chicago

THE
HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT
OF THE SUMMER SESSION
IN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS
IN THE UNITED STATES

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE
SOCIAL SCIENCES IN CANDIDACY FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
JUNE, 1945

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WATSON DICKERMAN

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Origins

The summer session in higher institutions (and indeed the summer school in general) appears to have originated in the United States. It developed in response to demands for (1) in-service education for teachers, (2) summer study for regular students of higher institutions, and (3) summer study for adults other than teachers. Of these three demands, the first had by far the greatest influence on the birth and growth of the summer session, which would probably have appeared as a result of this pressure alone but might not have appeared so soon nor grown so rapidly.

The institutional antecedents of the summer session as an agency of in-service education for teachers included education societies; teachers' associations; institutes; summer normal schools; private summer schools for teachers; and summer schools in normal schools, colleges, and universities. Those of the summer session as an agency of summer study for regular students of higher institutions included field expeditions; marine laboratories; summer conferences; and summer courses--all of which were usually conducted at, or by, higher institutions. Those of the summer session as an agency of summer study for adults other than teachers included numerous manifestations of the growing adult education movement and such summer activities as chauteauqua assemblies; summer conferences; summer schools of philosophy and literature; proprietary summer schools; and summer conferences, courses, and schools at colleges and universities.

In the early years of the summer school (roughly 1870-1900) there was no clear indication that the summer session in higher institutions was to become the dominant type of summer school. For during that period such other types of summer schools as summer normal schools, chautauqua assemblies, proprietary summer schools, etc. were much more numerous than summer sessions in higher institutions. At present, however, there appears to be little doubt that the summer session in higher institutions has become the dominant type of summer school.

Purposes

The primary purpose of the summer session in higher institutions has been the provision of opportunities for summer study to teachers, students, and adults other than teachers.

Of these three groups, teachers have been from the beginning and continue to be the summer session's chief concern. At first, statements of summer-session purposes offered teachers a chance to enlarge their knowledge of various branches of the curriculum (especially sciences and languages) and to learn the newest pedagogical practices. Between 1895 and 1910 they emphasized opportunity to progress toward certificates, undergraduate degrees, and (less often) graduate degrees. After 1910 summer sessions continued to emphasize work for certificates but accorded primary importance to work for degrees, the universities devoting special attention to work for graduate degrees. Since 1930 the summer sessions of many higher institutions, especially those of universities, have begun to make special announcement of conferences, institutes, and (since 1936) workshops for teachers.

Mention of educational opportunities for students began to appear in statements of aims of summer sessions about as soon as mention of opportunities for teachers but usually less promi-

nently and less frequently. The earliest statements about work for students stressed field work and research in the sciences, study of law and medicine, and, more frequently, make-up work for college students and preparatory work for subcollege students. Soon a few institutions began to call attention to opportunities to shorten the time necessary to earn undergraduate and graduate degrees. By 1920 acceleration toward the bachelor's degree had become the most prominently mentioned function of summer sessions in colleges, teachers' colleges, and universities, and by 1930 universities mentioned acceleration toward graduate degrees even more prominently. Meanwhile, opportunity to repair deficiencies received less emphasis in statements of aims. As of 1940 a few summer sessions were giving more prominence to work for students than to work for teachers.

Prior to 1900 not more than a handful of summer sessions in higher institutions made any reference to adults other than teachers in their statements of aims. Shortly after the turn of the century, however, a few institutions began to include in these statements some such blanket phrase as "other qualified persons" and, a decade later, "persons of leisure," "persons not interested in credit," etc. By 1930 professional and cultural opportunities for adults other than teachers were quite commonly mentioned in statements of purposes of colleges and university summer sessions, but were still given no such prominence as were offerings for teachers and for undergraduate, graduate, and pre-college students.

To meet the demands of the three groups referred to in the foregoing paragraphs has been the primary purposes of the summer session in higher institutions. Less important objectives have been (1) to put the work of the parent institution on an 'all-year basis in order to more fully utilize staff, plant, and facilities

and (less frequently) in order to achieve the convenience of four-quarter organization; (2) to augment faculty salaries, meet the competition of other institutions, and earn a profit for the parent institution; and (3) to provide educational services which can be more appropriately arranged in the summer session than in the regular session.

Some authorities see little difference between the aims of summer sessions and those of regular sessions of higher institutions.

The summer session has occasionally been charged with confusion as to its objectives.

Clientele and Services

For the general period under discussion, 1870-1940, the student body in summer sessions of higher institutions appears to have been composed of the following groups: teachers, about 65 per cent; students, about 25 per cent; adults other than teachers, an uncertain but quite small proportion.

The teacher group was the largest one in the early summer sessions and it has remained such, though it may have decreased somewhat in proportion to the other two groups. For example, at Cornell University the proportion of teachers in the summer student body decreased from 73.9 per cent in 1892 to 44.5 per cent in 1940 and at Harvard University from 53.8 per cent in 1890 to 41.2 per cent in 1940; also, the proportion which enrollments in education courses were of total enrollments in summer sessions of all higher institutions decreased from 69.7 per cent in 1926 to 64.6 per cent in 1932. Until 1900 the teacher group was made up principally of elementary school teachers but since that time high school teachers have become its most numerous subdivision; the number of administrative and supervisory officers and the number of college

teachers have grown while the number of normal school teachers has shrunk.

As for the student group, it seems to have been quite small at first, to have grown rapidly until about 1910, and to have decreased, proportionately, since then.

The adult group has been almost negligible in size throughout the entire period but appears to have grown somewhat in recent years.

The decisive influences upon the enrollment of these three groups in summer sessions may well have been freedom to attend, extent of need for further education, and extent of inducement or compulsion. The last of these three influences, exemplified in certificate requirements and in various types of financial reward, has played an important part in making teachers the largest group in summer student bodies.

College and university summer sessions at first offered teachers further study in subject fields, especially sciences and languages, and in methods of teaching the sciences, but soon they began to provide courses accredited toward degrees, and before the twentieth century was far advanced their emphasis was on work counting toward certification without examination, on courses in education, and (especially in universities) on courses accredited for graduate degrees. Normal schools concentrated on methods and on review of subject fields for certificate examinations, but as teachers' colleges grew in numbers they began to emphasize work which counted toward undergraduate and, to a lesser extent, graduate degrees, while normal schools began to decline.

Services for students consisted at first primarily of field expeditions in the sciences and of preparatory work for pre-college students and make-up work for regular students with de-

ficiencies. Later these emphases gave place to (but were never entirely supplanted by) acceleration toward undergraduate and graduate degrees.

What little work was provided for adults other than teachers during the nineteenth century was more professional than cultural in nature, and this emphasis has grown during the present century, especially in recent years.

An important development in the services provided by summer sessions in higher institutions has been the trend, particularly marked in recent years, toward short courses for teachers and adults other than teachers. Short courses for teachers have most often taken the form of curriculum laboratories and workshops. Their development is partly the result of those factors which have led to increased length of service for teachers and partly the result of recent emphasis on curriculum reconstruction and general evaluation of services in schools and colleges and the resultant heightening of concern with the practical and immediate problems which face teachers on the job. Short courses for adults, which have been mainly of the institute type, are adapted to their lack of longer time for study and to their concern with immediate problems. Some summer-session directors foresee a considerable expansion in this type of service to professional groups other than teachers.

Extra-curriculum activities have long constituted an important aspect of summer sessions in higher institutions.

Organization and Administration

Long before the advent of summer sessions, summer study existed in many American colleges and universities by virtue of the fact that their calendars ran well into (and sometimes through) the summer months or started again in the late summer. This ar-

rangement is said to have been due to placement of the long vacation in the winter in order to allow students to remain at home during the coldest weather and in order to make them available as schoolmasters, of whom there was a shortage. Later these considerations became less urgent and higher institutions gradually rearranged their calendars in such a way as to leave the summer months free. The way was now open for summer sessions in higher institutions but their advent and growth were delayed by contemporary prejudices against summer study.

The six-week term early gained popularity because it permitted a certain amount both of summer study and of the still-prized summer vacation. As a single term of six weeks or a double term of twelve, it remains the commonest type of summer calendar. Eight- and nine-week terms have recently been growing in favor; their greater length makes them better adapted to graduate study which is now much emphasized but their greater cost and inroads on the summer vacation are drawbacks. The twelve-week term is general in institutions which operate on the four-quarter plan, a plan which is usually considered to be the ultimate type of calendar organization for American higher institutions but which is still more honored in theory than in practice; however, the four-quarter plan was given some impetus by the first world war and has grown considerably with the present war. Summer calendars are becoming characterized less by one or two terms for the summer session as a whole than by an aggregation of terms representing the many varied services of the modern summer session.

Summer instruction in most higher institutions in the United States began as private undertakings by members of the institutions' faculties, the parent institutions usually contributing sponsorship, facilities, and publicity. Gradually, colleges and

universities assumed control of these private ventures, frequently marking the transition by designating them summer sessions rather than summer schools. In spite of the general tendency of higher institutions to regard their summer sessions as at least quasi-integral parts of the parent institutions, summer sessions characteristically remain separately administered. Administration by committee was common when summer schools in higher institutions were private ventures and it not infrequently persisted under institutional control. More often, however, chairmen of administrative committees became directors of summer sessions, the committees often continuing in an advisory capacity.

Financing

Many higher institutions expect their summer sessions to support themselves from tuition fees, ask them to pay overhead charges, and hope that they will earn a profit to be turned over to general institutional funds. These practices are most characteristic of privately-supported institutions, less so of state universities and colleges, least so of state teachers' colleges. But probably a majority of higher institutions expect their summer sessions to pay their own way.

This policy is an inheritance of the summer session's origin as a private venture. But its persistence in a day when most summer sessions have been accepted as quasi-integral parts of their parent institutions and in the face of almost unanimous censure from summer-session directors, educational theorists, standards committees, and surveys is difficult to explain and impossible to justify. Moreover, it casts serious doubts on the legitimacy of summer-session services. A number of signs appear to point to more generous institutional support of summer sessions in the future: there seems to have been a historical tendency in

this direction, the best educational thought is overwhelmingly in its favor, increasing similarity of purpose between summer and regular sessions should make for similarity of support, the possibility of declining enrollments and increasing costs may force more generous support.

Inadequate institutional support of summer sessions brings about unorthodox methods of determining salaries of summer-session teachers. Bases of pay for summer teaching include proportion of annual salary, academic rank, flat sum unrelated to salary or rank, number of students in the instructor's classes. The first of these is held to be the most desirable and there appears to have been a clear historical trend in this direction, though such progress is sometimes vitiated by overloading and by inserting contingent clauses in summer teaching contracts.

The very considerable use of publicity which characterized summer sessions as private ventures appears to have grown rather than decreased with their assumption of official status; it is an inevitable corollary of inadequate financial support. The most commonly used mediums of publicity seem to be regular and preliminary bulletins, extra-curricular activities, selected mailing lists, and advertisements. However, the only medium in whose efficacy there is general confidence among summer-session directors and students is the recommendation of satisfied customers.

Conclusions

Here are some of the achievements commonly claimed for the summer session in higher institutions in the United States:

1. It has provided additional proof of the practicability of serious study during the summer months.
2. For teachers, it has been a means of inservice education; of professional advancement; of recreation, inspiration, and cultural and social growth.

3. For students, it has been a means of repairing deficiencies and of accelerating progress toward undergraduate and graduate degrees.
4. For adults other than teachers, it has provided opportunities for professional and cultural development.
5. It has brought about fuller utilization of institutional resources.
6. It has served as an experiment station for higher education.
7. It has made higher institutions more responsive to the needs of society.

And there are some of the shortcomings commonly charged against the summer session:

1. It has employed financial practices which cast doubts on the legitimacy of its status as an educational institution.
2. It has been used in the interests of the parent institution rather than in the interests of the clientele whose needs it has claimed to serve.
3. It has winked at inferior standards of admission, teaching, scholarship, research, and administration.
4. It has prostituted itself as a summer resort.
5. It has tried to be all things to all men.

Upon reflection, it will be seen that the first shortcoming listed above is the source of most of the others. "Catchall" aims, unseemly publicity, "sheepstealing" from other institutions, lax entrance requirements, large and heterogeneous classes, inferior scholarship, overemphasis on entertainment, curriculums determined by past registration figures and by logrolling, high tuition fees, contingent clauses in summer teaching contracts--to the extent that these evils exist in summer sessions, it would appear that they are directly or indirectly related to inadequate financial support of the summer session or to the practice of allowing faculty members to stretch insufficient annual salaries by teaching summer classes for whatever the tuition fees will produce.

The way out is clear:

1. Let higher institutions in the United States re-examine their objectives.
2. Let them then ask themselves whether or not their summer sessions contribute to these objectives.
3. If the answer to (2) is yes, let them support their summer sessions in the same way as they support their regular sessions.
4. If the answer to (2) is no, let them abandon their summer sessions.

Separate direction of the summer session need not occasion the same concern that has been manifested above about unorthodox financial practices as long as it is principally a matter of hiring additional help and as long as the clientele of the summer session is so different from that of the regular session. Some authorities believe that the clientele of the summer session will soon become the same as that of the regular session, citing the increasing length of teachers' careers and the war-induced trend toward year-round calendars. Such a change may come but it will not come soon.

The summer session's immediate problems are pressing enough. Paramount among these are (1) the necessity for financial reform as suggested above, and (2) the determination to continue to deserve its reputation for responsive service and imaginative experimentation.

